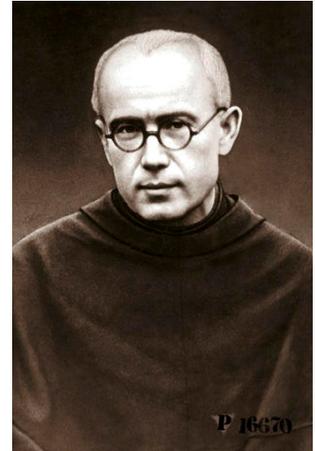


Week 13: St. Maximilian Kolbe/Dies Irae Sequence

"If God causes you to suffer much, it is a sign that He has great designs for you, and that He certainly intends to make you a saint. And if you wish to become a great saint, entreat Him yourself to give you much opportunity for suffering; for there is no wood better to kindle the fire of holy love than the wood of the cross, which Christ used for His own great sacrifice of boundless charity." -St. Ignatius of Loyola

St. Maximilian Kolbe

- b. 1894-d.1941, Raymond Kolbe grew up in Poland, during the time of a Russian occupation, with a German father and Polish mother. His working class father struggled with the unstable social structure created by a split government. As a young boy, Raymond prayed to Mary, the Patroness of Poland, for political reunification and for healing of his beloved country.
- When Raymond was 12, he had a vision of the Virgin Mary. He recalls, "That night I asked the Mother of God what was to become of me. Then she came to me holding two crowns, one white, the other red. She asked me if I was willing to accept either of these crowns. The white one meant that I should persevere in purity and the red that I should become a martyr. I said that I would accept them both."
- A year later, when Raymond was 13, he and his older brother Francis joined the Franciscan order. Raymond was allowed to profess his novitiate vows at the age of 16, at which time he took the name Maximilian. When he professed his final vows in 1914, at the age of 20, he took on the additional name of Maria because of his devotion to and love of Mary.
- "For St. Maximilian, the Immaculate Conception is a mystery not simply to be believed, but also lived by all the faithful. He strove, therefore, at all times and in every way to advance the *cause of the Immaculate*, introducing her into all hearts, 'so that she may erect in them the throne of her Son.' -*The Era of the Immaculate*, by [Fr. Louis Maximilian M. Smith F.I.](#)
- In 1917, Maximilian organized the *Militia Immaculatae* (M.I.), which encouraged people to pray to Mary and to experience for themselves the consoling mystery of the Immaculate Conception. The organization has spread and now spans 48 countries and has over 3 million members.
- Maximilian received doctorates in philosophy and theology then, in 2018, was ordained a priest. As a priest, Maximilian taught at the Krakow Seminary until he developed tuberculosis and was forced to take a prolonged leave of absence.
- Maximilian suffered from tuberculosis symptoms throughout his life, but continued in his work nonetheless. During his prolonged time of recovery, he wrote and published devotionals, again encouraging all people to recognize their own invitation to receive what God is conceiving in us all. "The Spirit breathes when He wills. Our duty is to be always ready for His Divine inspirations."
- In 1930-1936 Maximilian went to minister to the people of Asia. While there, he attempted to open 3 monasteries. The one in China never took root, one in India is now closed, but the monastery he began in Nagasaki, Japan still stands and remains a monastery today. When he built the monastery, he was told that he should not build on that side of the mountain, that it was not as spiritual as the other side. Defying what he saw as superstition, he continued construction as planned. When the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Nagasaki, the side of the mountain he was told to build on was completely destroyed, but the monastery remained unharmed.



- In 1939 World War II began, and most of the monks left the monastery. Maximilian was one of a few friars to stay in order to set up a temporary hospital at the monastery. When the Germans occupied Poland he was arrested, but released 3 months later and given the opportunity to sign the Deutsche Volksliste and claim his German heritage. He refused to sign, and continued his work at the monastery where he offered refuge to those in need during the German occupation including 2,000 Jews. He continued using the monastery as a publishing house and published many anti-Nazi pamphlets. He wrote, “No one in the world can change Truth. What we can do and should do is to seek truth and to serve it when we have found it. The real conflict is the inner conflict. Beyond armies of occupation and the hecatombs of extermination camps, there are two irreconcilable enemies in the depth of every soul: good and evil, sin and love. And what use are the victories on the battlefield if we ourselves are defeated in our innermost personal selves?”
- In 1941 the German Gestapo closed down the monastery, arrested Maximilian, and sent him to Auschwitz Concentration Camp where he continued to serve as a priest, even though the decision subjected him to harassment, beatings and lashings.
- Two months after his arrival at Auschwitz, one of the inmates escaped. As a punishment, ten prisoners were randomly selected to be sent down into an underground bunker where they would starve to death. One of the men selected called out “My wife! My children!” so Maximilian offered to take his place.
- A janitor who worked at Auschwitz later testified that Maximilian spent the whole time in that bunker on his knees, in the center of the cell, in prayer with the other prisoners. He testified that when anyone entered the room to check on the prisoners, Maximilian had a look of complete peace. After 2 weeks of no food or water, the other prisoners had all died. Maximilian was given a lethal injection in order to clear out the bunker for more prisoners. His remains were cremated on August 15th, the Feast Day of the Assumption of Mary.
- On October 10, 1982 at his canonization, Pope John Paul II declared Maximilian Kolbe a confessor and a Martyr of Charity. He is one of ten 20th-century martyrs who are depicted in statues at Westminster Abby in London.

Reflection Questions:

Have you experienced a time in your life where suffering has made you more aware of God? If so, what from that experience lingers as you have gone on with your life? If not, looking back on a difficult time in your life, what was your sense of God during that time?

Now take a moment to recollect your most peaceful moments. What was your experience of God during those moments? If that sense of peace is not constant for you, do you have a sense of what can get in your way of experiencing God’s peace?

When Maximilian was only 12, he accepted a red crown from Mary expressing his willingness to die as a martyr. That vision of Mary shaped Maximilian’s entire life. We may not all know exactly how it will happen, but we all know that someday we will die. How does that knowing shape the way you live?

Given the current state of isolation in our city, country, and world, how is God asking you to love others? Most simply strove to survive the concentration camps, yet Maximilian’s heart was opened to selfless generosity. How might God be calling you to live in a spirit of generosity?